

Hadrian Learning Trust

**Education Design Brief for
Hexham Middle School and Queen Elizabeth High School**



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1. Our Ethos: “*Outstanding eagerness to promote good learning*” *

This is a friendly, welcoming school, built on foundations of mutual respect and care for others. We work together to become all we can be.

We share a love of learning and believe in the highest academic standards for everyone. We value education in its broadest sense, knowing that the arts, sport and other opportunities help shape us as individuals and as citizens of the wider world.

We are committed to enabling all of our students to develop their knowledge and understanding, skills and mindset, so that they can take their next steps with confidence. Our aim is that every child will grow into a happy, fulfilled and successful adult.

* *From the Charter granted to the people of Hexham by Queen Elizabeth I, 1599*

2. Overview

This Education Design Brief sets out the broad intent and detailed requirements of Hadrian Learning Trust (HLT) for the provision of a new building or buildings for Hexham Middle School (HMS) and Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS).

In 2018, HLT formally consulted on bringing the two schools together to form a single 11-18 secondary school. In the light of feedback on the wider re-organisation that this would have entailed, the Trust did not proceed with its proposal.

A positive outcome of the consultation was broad community support for major investment in HLT's schools' estate. In July 2018, Northumberland County Council agreed to fund a feasibility study with an indicative budget for the project of £38-40 million.

This is a complex project due to a number of factors:

- a. HMS and QEHS currently occupy two separate sites, about a mile apart, in the market town of Hexham, each including Grade II listed buildings.
- b. Potential site options, including possible co-location, have been evaluated by a joint project team including NCC officers, professional advisors and HLT. For the purpose of this Brief, we have assumed that HMS and QEHS will be co-located on the current QEHS site, although most of the content would apply whichever site is selected.
- c. The Grade II-listed Hydro building at QEHS is included in Priority Schools Building Programme 2. The Department for Education (DfE) has indicated that the funding assigned for this could be vired to a broader project. This funding is time-limited to March 2021.
- d. The schools' age ranges of 9-13 and 13-18 do not fit typical Primary, Secondary or All-Through models. This needs to be considered carefully when using tools such

as the DfE's BB103 Guidance and Schedule of Accommodation. HLT have produced bespoke Schedules of Accommodation to reflect our curriculum requirements.

- e. The schools' combined number on roll could be in excess of 1900 students, which is very large by national standards.
- f. In principle, HLT is in favour of a move to a single site for educational and operational reasons and because this may deliver the best value for public money.
- g. However, this raises crucial questions regarding site capacity, scale and how the Middle and High schools would relate to each other.

HLT is clear that any design solution must be of high quality, efficiently delivering specialist facilities, while providing each child with a "home of their own".

While maintaining each school's distinctiveness, we intend to create a clear sense of progression through the different phases of students' educational journey:



We also want to maintain the close, collegiate teamwork of our staff across curriculum, pastoral, departmental and support functions, which is fundamental to delivering our schools' success.

We hope that all our stakeholders will be as excited as we are by the opportunities this project offers. We know that they will not accept a solution that does not at least match the educational experience currently provided.

Careful planning is also required to ensure that the provision for students is not compromised during the construction process.

Our ambition is to create inspiring and purposeful learning environments that will serve our young people well for many years to come. They will enable us to share good practice with other schools in Northumberland.

Our schools have the potential to be assets for the whole community, celebrating the best of our past while providing exceptional facilities that can help build an exciting future.

3. Developing the Brief

This Education Design Brief has been developed with the assistance of The Learning Crowd, a specialist consultancy who have worked on award-winning projects across the UK. It has been informed by meetings held with:

- Student representatives of both schools.
- Teachers, curriculum and pastoral staff in both schools.
- Support staff including administration, finance, IT, catering and site management.
- Senior Leadership Teams and Trustees.
- Parents and the wider community will be formally consulted in due course.
- We have also conducted a detailed analysis of our current curriculum and extra-curricular provision to ensure that we can continue to offer an excellent experience for our students.

Naturally, our curriculum will continue to evolve over time, so it is important that flexibility and adaptability are built into any solution.

An Education Design Brief is essentially an iterative process, which will be refined as our ideas and thinking develop. We are pragmatic and open-minded and particularly welcome the reasoned input of professionals who can bring their knowledge and experience from many other projects.

4. Historical Context

The history of our schools dates back to 1599, when the people of Hexham and surrounding area were granted a charter by Elizabeth I on account of their "Outstanding eagerness to promote good learning". This magnificent charter remains in our possession and we would like to find a suitable way to display it in any new build.

Since then, education in Hexham has evolved through a variety of organisational forms and occupied a range of buildings on different sites. The current arrangement dates to 1976, when the Three Tier arrangement of First, Middle and High schools was created to accommodate a Comprehensive system and the raising of the school leaving age to 16.

The HMS site of about five hectares reveals some of this history.

- The Grade II-listed Fellside building was designed by architects Oliver Leesom and Wood in 1910 as a high-status Grammar school, with its impressive stone exterior, oak panelled corridors and main hall with hammerhead beams.
- The Beaumont building was built in the 1930's to house those who did not qualify for the Grammar school. Like Fellside, it is also designed as a quadrangle around an inner courtyard but is much more modest in form and materials, with an emphasis on the virtues of light and fresh air.
- The Orchard block is a 1980's addition adjacent to Fellside, built to accommodate a bulge in student numbers and now forms a self-contained setting for Year 5 pupils.

QEHS occupies a site of about 10 hectares that has been much more piece-meal in its development.

- The Hydro is Grade II-listed. Its origins were as Westfield House, a private dwelling in 27 acres of grounds including a walled garden, built in the 1850's. In 1879, the original house was greatly extended to create the Tynedale Hydropathic hotel, designed by architect W L Newcomb at a cost of £30,000. In 1907, it was extended further with the addition of a North Wing including a large glazed Winter Garden. The Hydro closed in 1941 and was used as a sanitorium for children with TB. Subsequently, it was used as a teacher training establishment and then in 1976 became part of QEHS.
- What is known as the Lower School at QEHS is a CLASP building dating from 1965, with several sprawling additions and extensions added over subsequent decades.

Both HMS and QEHS benefit from generous green space, mature trees and open views across the surrounding countryside. This contributes immeasurably to a calm, purposeful atmosphere, reflected in the excellent behaviour of all age groups. However, the disparate layout of buildings across both sites means that time is wasted moving from one lesson to another. Our hope is that this will be addressed through a more compact design in future.

5. Educational Context

HMS and QEHS are successful and popular schools, attracting a high proportion of their students from beyond their respective catchment areas. This success is based on excellent academic outcomes, educational experience in the broadest sense and a shared sense of being part of a caring, learning community. It is imperative that none of these are compromised in any new build.

5.1. Hexham Middle School

HMS is a good and improving school (see DfE [performance tables](#) and most recent [Ofsted report](#)).

Parents value the bridge that HMS provides between smaller First schools and QEHS, especially in Years 5 and 6. Teaching in these Key Stage 2 years is based on a Primary model, with much of the school day based in a home classroom. Years 5 and 6 do benefit from access to specialist facilities for art, music, PE, science and technology.

The experience for Year 7 and 8 is more akin to a Secondary model, with specialist subject teaching across the timetable and students moving around the school site for most of their lessons.

A huge choice of extra-curricular activities are offered. These include art, bikeability, ceilidh, choir, computing, environmental, film, forest school, orchestra, rock band, Japanese, Mandarin and Latin. Sport is also a big part of school life, including athletics, cricket, cross country, dodgeball, football, hockey, netball, orienteering and rugby.

5.2. Queen Elizabeth High School

QEHS is in the top 8% of schools nationally and one of the top three performing schools in the North East, based on 2018 Progress 8 measures (see DfE [performance tables](#) and most recent [Ofsted report](#)). The school is proud of its exceptionally broad curriculum offer. It also has a large and successful Sixth Form.

QEHS' traditional academic strengths are complemented by a deep commitment to education in the broadest sense. Creative and performing arts play a huge part in school life. Examples include the annual art exhibition, choirs, Brazilian drumming, folk, jazz, rock bands, orchestra, Youth Theatre and Youth Dance Tynedale. Participation in sport is also high, including cricket, hockey, football, netball, rugby, rowing and trampolining.

5.3. Numbers on Roll, October 2018

HMS	PAN	NOR
Year 5	150	105
Year 6	150	116
Year 7	150	121
Year 8	150	113
Total	600	455
QEHS	PAN	NOR
Year 9	306	312
Year 10	306	301
Year 11	306	293
Year 12	200	205
Year 13	200	179
Total	1318	1,290

6. Distinctive Requirements

Most schools share some requirements in common, which are reflected in generic DfE guidance, such as Buildings Bulletin 103. Beyond these, the distinctive characters of HMS and QEHS are shaped by particular aspects of our current spaces and provision, which must be retained or enhanced.

To guide prospective bidders, we have provided:

- School-specific Schedules of Accommodation (Appendix A), based upon analysis of our curriculum needs.
- Detailed consideration of the requirements for different spaces (Appendix B).

Below, we highlight some of our distinctive requirements.

6.1. Relationship between Middle and High Schools

Co-locating the Middle and High schools creates unique opportunities to enhance the quality of educational experience, while realising operational efficiencies.

Our aim is that each age group should feel they have a “home of their own”, with a clear sense of progression through the different phases of their educational journey.

Middle School pupils should feel part of a smaller school, with their own play areas, entrance and social space. During Years 5 and 6 (Key Stage 2), most of their lessons will take place in their home classroom or Middle School specialist spaces. However, they will also have the opportunity to access the high school’s specialist facilities on occasion. Years 7 and 8 will have a similar experience, with their own separate social space and play areas. However, it is intended that they will routinely access the specialist facilities shared with the High School, for subjects such as science and the arts. This familiarity will ease transition into Year 9, without losing the excitement of moving on.

High School Years 9 to 11 should also have their own entrance and separate exterior social spaces. It is intended that each year group will have its own social base. As many Year 9 students will be new to the site, this will help them settle in, although our experience is that they do so quickly.

High School Sixth Form is a larger proportion of the student body than would be the case in a Secondary school of similar size. As students progress to more self-directed learning, it is important that they have appropriate social and study space. While some teaching is in smaller seminar groups and larger lectures, most teaching will be distributed around the High School. This will enable our Sixth Formers to continue to be excellent role models for younger students.

6.2. PE and Sport

The QEHS site does not meet the DfE's minimum site area guidance for a total of 1906 students. Co-location of the two schools would effectively mean relinquishing all of the grass pitches used by HMS. This inevitably impacts on the external space available for sport. In order to overcome this and timetable the necessary amount of PE, a creative solution will be required which:

- Compensates for the loss of outdoor space with greater provision of interior sports space above the minimum typically provided.
- Makes the most of currently under-used areas of the site to maximise the provision of hard and soft play areas and Multi-Use Games Areas. One example could be a fitness trail or cycle track utilising the current Hydro drive and pathways.
- Explores the provision of additional Artificial Grass Pitches, which can be more intensively used. Further investigation, in partnership with NCC and Sports England, is required on the specification for these to ensure that increased maintenance costs can be offset by lettings income from community use.
- Enables QEHS to timetable half a year group for PE and enables HMS to utilise sports hall space during examinations, sat by cohorts of up to 360 students in a session.

6.3. Halls, Creative and Performing Arts

A separate Hall is required for each school for assemblies, performances and a host of other activities involving larger groups.

Creative and performing arts are fundamental to the life of both schools. It is essential that the new design at least maintains the quality and quantum of current provision. For example, the 'black box' Studio Theatre at QEHS is a highly valued space used for drama, dance, smaller scale productions, Sixth Form lectures, staff briefings and parents' evenings.

Visitors regularly comment on the quality of the artwork showcased in the Hydro. We would like to see this curated approach adopted throughout our new buildings.

6.4. External Spaces and Landscaping

The current settings of both schools facilitate a calm, purposeful atmosphere, which we wish to replicate. The quality of landscape design will be key to this. The social spaces for different age groups will need to be large enough and offer appropriate facilities for sitting, eating (in better weather) and keeping occupied. The design must enable straightforward staff supervision, with clear sight lines.

A unique feature of the current QEHS site is the Walled Garden to the rear of the Hydro. This is a magical space, maintained by volunteers but currently enjoyed by a relatively small number of students. We are keen to explore how its atmosphere can be maintained but the space be re-imagined to provide peace and tranquillity for more of our students and staff.

6.5. Collaborative Staff Working

The close, collegiate teamwork of our staff across curriculum, pastoral, departmental and support functions is fundamental to delivering our success. Therefore, it is important that the new design takes this fully into account and provides appropriate spaces to enable this collegiate approach to continue to thrive.

For example, distinct features of QEHS are the Curriculum and Pastoral Teams, who oversee and coordinate much of the activity that relates directly to students. It is anticipated that the work of the Curriculum Team will broaden to more fully meet the needs of the Middle School, therefore a location convenient for both schools will be important. However, it is envisaged that there will continue to be a distinct Pastoral Team for each school. At present, the Curriculum and Pastoral teams at QEHS are physically quite separate. Whilst they have distinct functions, being located more closely would be beneficial.

6.6. Teaching and Learning Hub

We are particularly keen to establish an area within the schools that will form a base for professional development. This will house resources to support best practice and training space, including an observation classroom. It is envisaged that such a facility will enable the Trust to support the professional development of teachers in other Northumberland schools.

6.7. Potential Operational Efficiencies

Co-location presents opportunities for the schools to work together more effectively with shared visitor reception, back office administration, kitchen, plant and so forth. These efficiencies should be reflected in the design.

6.8. Community Use

We are committed to the idea that our schools should be open to the wider community in the evenings, at weekends and during the holidays where possible. For example, the Hydro and Winter Garden is a popular wedding venue, providing welcome additional revenue for the school. With improved facilities, there is scope to greatly increase community use and lettings income. We know that local sports clubs are desperately in need of better venues. By combining the beautiful Grade-II listed buildings with exciting new large spaces, there may also be the opportunity to attract conferences and exhibitions, resulting in economic benefits to Hexham and the surrounding area.